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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000428

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: SRSG KAI EIDE: KARZAI STILL THE PERSON TO BEAT

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY. SRSG Kai Eide told Ambassador Holbrooke on 2/13 that Karzai, with all of his political vulnerabilities, was still the strongest political figure and would likely win reelection.

Karzai still on top  
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[12](#). (C) Eide told Ambassador Holbrooke that he had developed a strong relationship with Karzai, and that he, more than any other diplomat, could speak openly and candidly to Karzai. Eide conceded that he was not achieving any improved relations between Karzai and the internationals. Eide had recently told Karzai he saw three paths forward on Karzai's relations with the international community: (1) he turns around relations; (2) he continues to confront the internationals; or (3) he considers how long he wishes to stay in office.

[13](#). (C) Eide, nevertheless, assessed that there were no obvious alternative leaders to replace Karzai. Eide thought no non-Pashtuns could win. He believed Atmar was the strongest leader and administrator in the country, but agreed Atmar would not run as long as Karzai was a candidate for reelection. Eide believed no expatriate Afghans, citing Ashraf Ghani and Ali Jallali specifically, would have a chance to win any popular support.

[14](#). (U) Ambassador Holbrooke's party cleared this message.  
DELL